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Marisa Francisca Boyle

Senior Thesis Project
BASI Pilates Certification



I AM RECEIVING MY PILATES CERTIFICATION

Marisa F. Boyle

The Responsibility of the Dancer

“The Dancer believes that his art has something to say which cannot be expressed in words or any other way than by dancing...there are times when the simple dignity of movement can fulfill the function of a volume of words. There are movements that impinge upon the nerves with a strength that is incomparable, for movement has power to stir the senses and emotions, unique in itself. This is the dancer’s justification for being, and his reason for searching further for deeper aspects of his art, (Humphrey, 1937).”

This quote by Doris Humphrey evokes emotion and is one reason why a dancer dances. Choreographers rehearsing an ensemble express what they wish to say through movement. Dancers from a very young age become curious about their bodies and wish to explore their limbs and the way their body moves to music. There are many different forms of dance, but the first form of dance that is still considered most important is ballet (Bennahum). Ballet is extremely traditional and through intense training programs such as The Royal Academy of Dance examinations, dancers are given the opportunity to perfect their technique.

This tradition of ballet has existed since the Renaissance period in Italy. In *The Living Dance*, Lynn Garafola states that, “The word ‘ballo’ was a generic term for dance. It could indicate any kind of dance or an entertainment devoted to dancing. According to scholar Barbara Sparti, there were three types of dancing at Renaissance banquets and festivities-dances performed by the hosts and his guests; dance in which everybody took part; and “moresche”, which were interludes performed as entertainment. These interludes portray heroic, exotic or pastoral scenes; courtiers, costumes and masks, and

there could be special effects like fire. No expense was spared. The allegorical themes and symbolism flattered and idealized the prince, dramatizing his power through the conspicuous display of his wealth “ (Bennahum 111). The Queen Catherine de Medici, understood the importance of theater and incorporating ballet into everyday life. Le Ballet Comique de la Reine, also known as The Ballet of the Queen, came about in 1519 and was originated in Italy. The tradition of ballet was an opportunity for royalty to portray messages to the public about what they valued. There was now an emphasis on the use of space, symmetry, geometry, abstract patterns and complex configurations. The ballet showed that movement patterns could have a meaning and be a form of symbolic action, an expression of cosmic harmony, of the noble, heroic and the ideal (Bennahum 112).

Ballet is the most technical form of dance technique and is essential even today if one wishes to be a well-rounded dancer. Although much of ballet is still based off of the traditional aspects, ballet has become more of a virtuositic spectacle. It is still believed that to fully understand how one's body moves and how all of the muscles work to create movement, a dancer must invest quality and time in ballet technique. Ballet is an extremely important part of a dancer's career and will allow one to carry correct technique into other dance styles. Tekla Kostek, a ballet Professor at Loyola Marymount University and a professional ballerina, has turned her ballet class into an amazing art form rather than only focusing on perfect technique. She places strong emphasis on performance quality. Her use of imagery in class allows one to further understand the use of the body. Tekla teaches that ballet is a way to fully invest one's whole self and place a strong emphasis on discipline and focus. As represented in Tekla's class, ballet technique began

to merge with human emotions into the twentieth Century, thus leading to the modern dance era (Kostek).

One of the most important aspects of dance is the achievement of a disciplined mind and concentration. A dancer must work to stay focused no matter what the current situation is or where the environment may be. In the academic class To Dance is Human taught by Judith Scalin, the students learn about what it means to be human and how it relates to movement. Judy emphasizes that dancing makes people more human because it is a tool for a human to express themselves through their movement. A choreographer creates a piece of work that can be compared to the composition of an artist's painting. The choreography represents the person's life and perhaps their experiences or connections with other human beings (Scalin).

"By definition, American modern dance is the art of the individual (Siegel 85)." The founder of all modern was Isadora Duncan. Duncan brought a whole new life to dance. She rejected traditional views of movement and costumes and brought a free spirited feeling to her choreography. Modern dance is a medium that allows the artist to construct a personal view of the world as well as allowing one to embody the movement through physical form and presence. American modern dance was a new form of dance that was no longer based on one systematic training method. Modern dancers had the desire to move in a personal way and to express their feelings and temperament through their choreography (Siegel).

Modern dance has revealed great emphasis on the release of the body. Women and men's bodies took on a new strength and form that most people were not used to. Modern dance was meant to be aesthetic, if not Art, uplifting, inspiring, at the very least a

notch above recreation or exercise and certainly more beneficial to the viewer's mind and spirit than a trip to the music hall (Siegel). Duncan stated that, "the body is only a transparent representation, or 'expression', of the soul. Body-building thus was another form of character building (Duncan)." During the modern dance era, systematic training was no longer as important. What really mattered was how a dancer experimented with her body. Modern dance opened up the door and allowed dancers to express their personal and artistic ideas.

Postmodern dance created a way for dances to work in a more technical manner and also offered opposite opportunities as well. During the Judson era, one could participate in a dance movement at a church with little or no dance training. Postmodern dance had a strong emphasis on pedestrian movement. Statements were always being made without perfect lines. Postmodern dance allowed dancers to elevate themselves to higher levels. During this period dance was not only for the upper class or highly trained, it was for everyone. Dancers were allowed to make more choices about what they wanted to create and how they were going to create it.

In present society, dancers are faced with more choices than ever before. Where is this going to lead the art of dance in the future? A dancer is now faced with much freedom. There are more ways to reach out to audiences and more opportunities for people to get involved in different types of movement. Because our present art culture is evolving quickly shifting from theater, to television, video and computer, the youth of dance must explore new ways to change dance and to reach out to a diverse audience. A dancer now has more power than ever before to make drastic changes and create a new era of dance. With this force and with the imagination and determination of young

dancers today, the dance community has the opportunity to embark on a journey of creation and allow the evolution of dance as an art form to once again flourish.

Marisa F. Boyle

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Marisa F. Boyle

Personal Dance Aesthetic

When I was three, my mother took me to see my very first ballet performance, The Nutcracker. From the minute the lights turned on and lit up the giant stage, my eyes grew wide with surprise and I was instantly hooked. It may sound strange, but I can vividly remember the brightness of the lights and the extremely detailed oriented costumes. I especially remember at the end of the show Clara and the Nutcracker Prince were taken away up into the sky in a golden chariot. I thought that this production was the most miraculous event that I had ever laid eyes on. When the performance was over I said to my mother, "Mommy, I want to be up there someday." Soon enough, I was enrolled in ballet class and I have not stopped dancing ever since.

I started dancing at The Ballet Studio by the Sea in Malibu where I mainly took ballet class. Over the course of elementary, middle and High School, I took a variety of classes such as jazz and hip-hop. I participated in a wide variety of dance concerts everything from Swan Lake to a production containing only jazz performances. Along with dance, I was very into musical theater as well participating in a variety of shows such as "The Wizard of OZ" and "Alice and Wonderland." As I grew, I was not only studying ballet, but I still considered it the most important form of dance mainly because my teacher was extremely strict and in order to survive at her studio one must always have a disciplined focus. I loved to watch ballet and I very much wanted to grow to be a ballerina, but as I went through puberty and started to develop as a person, I realized that

a career in a ballet company was probably not the right decision for me. I wanted to become a well-rounded dancer, one who could learn a variety of different dance styles and still keep a strong ballet background.

My college dance career has been a four-year whirlwind of amazing experiences and great opportunities. At both The University of the Arts and Loyola Marymount, I have had the opportunity to study with many amazing teachers and learn a variety of techniques. Before I went away to college, I honestly didn't even realize how many styles of dance existed nor did I know much history about certain dancers and choreographers. At The University of the Arts, I had the opportunity to take ballet, jazz, tap and modern technique such as Graham and Horton. Before going away to college, I knew very little about Martha Graham and Lester Horton, but after two years of intense modern training, I felt as if I had accomplished so much as a dancer and I was working toward my goal of becoming extremely well rounded.

At Loyola Marymount University, the program was completely different from my old school, but the experience that I had was amazing. I had the opportunity to learn even more styles of dance and once again study under fantastic teachers whom I very much admire. Both schools have given me the opportunity to learn so much about dance and what it takes to become a professional dancer. Over the last four years, I have not only transformed into a great dancer, but into a more self-assured human being as well. Pursuing a dance major degree in college has allowed me to explore what I find beautiful in dance and has furthered my perspective of my personal dance aesthetic.

My highest ideals of professional dance have transformed dramatically over the time that I have been a dancer. When I was young, I had not yet been completely exposed

to the wide variety of dance that exists and I was unaware of how very much like art, almost any type of movement can be considered dance. Although I find many types of dance beautiful to the eye, the most intriguing performance to watch is one where the dancer/s are emotionally invested in their work. I find that a dancer who is willing to explore them on an extremely personal level can bring more to the stage. Although a certain dancer may have perfect extension or amazing turn out, I believe that this is not what makes a dance or a dancer beautiful. In order for a performance to completely captivate me, the dance must evoke some sort of emotion within myself whether it is anger, contentment or sorrow. When a dancer is completely dedicated to the work that they are portraying on stage, it touches the audience and can take one on a journey that they had never expected.

Over the last four years, I have had the opportunity to see many dance companies perform in Philadelphia and Los Angeles. I have seen a wide variety of work from The Pennsylvania Ballet to The Paul Taylor Company. At The University of the Arts, I had the opportunity to study ballet for two years from a teacher named Christine Cox who was a member of the Pennsylvania Ballet Company. While I was at school there, she started her own contemporary ballet company called Ballet X. I attended a couple of their performances and was completely awestruck. Although the shows took place in a smaller theater in Philadelphia with simple lighting, costumes and sets, the dancers were amazing. I particularly remember one performance where the dancers wore black the whole entire time and the show told a story about the relationships that exist between men and women. The ballet took the audience on a journey through various relationship scenarios. I was completely enthralled by the way the dancers moved. Not only are they

all strong ballet dancers, but also the contemporary style that Christine had incorporated was something I hadn't seen before.

As a dancer who wishes to one day perform on Broadway, I very much enjoy watching numerous styles of dance. At The University of the Arts I had the opportunity to take Fosse classes from a teacher who studied directly under Bob Fosse. I was also a part of numerous productions such as A Chorus Line and 42nd Street. When it comes to what I enjoy watching the most, Broadway would be my number one pick. If there were any style of performance that brings tears to my eyes, it would be a musical theater production. Although I love any type of musical, I most enjoy musicals that contain an immense amount of impressive dancing and movement. I have had the opportunity to see The Lion King musical twice at the Pantages Theater in Los Angeles. This production was so miraculous and detail oriented it was one of the most amazing spectacles I have ever seen. Not only were the sets and costumes spectacular, but also the technique of every single dancer was superb. To me this is true talent, when a dancer cannot only show expert technique, but they can sing and act as well. Having a great interest in musical theater is something that I have had since a young age, and I know that Broadway is the right path.

Throughout my dance career, I have had various choreographic opportunities, which I found extremely challenging. I had choreographed two pieces for the talent show at my High School my senior year. The dancers were hardly experienced and had very little training, which is what made the process difficult. After High School, I was always hoping for another opportunity to choreograph where I could choose the dancers and not have any limitations on my work. At The University of the Arts, every senior is required

to choreography for various showcases throughout the year. This becomes their senior thesis project. During freshmen year, I found that I had already started thinking about my piece and what I wished to do. When I transferred to LMU and learned that we could have the opportunity to choreograph and our work could be featured in a dance concert, I was excited by this idea. Unfortunately I let myself down and did not choreograph this year. Although I did not make a big deal about this, I am extremely disappointed in myself for not challenging myself enough and not taking advantage of this great opportunity. Over the last four years, I have had so many great ideas in my head that I have always wanted to translate on the stage. Hopefully I will have the opportunity to choreograph in the future and fulfill this goal.

The ideal dancer to me is not someone that is immensely skinny with perfect technique. Of course I find technique extremely important, but I believe what makes a talented dancer is the ability to captivate a whole audience whether it be some who is a dancer or someone who has never watched a dance concert before. I don't think that dancing is about showing off or working hard to see who can do the best tricks. What is most impressive to me is a dancer who can lift their head and arm out toward the audience with enough conviction and expression to cause tears. The most important dancer is an invested dancer who realizes that dance isn't all about mastering a crazy number of pirouettes but how one should properly execute those pirouettes. The most important quality that I believe a dancer must possess is discipline and focus. A focused dancer is always aware of their body and the movement they are creating and the discipline allows a dancer to concentrate and commit fully to their work.

Ever since I was young, I have always been taught that discipline is extremely important and throughout my dance career I have applied these lessons to my work. The most important thing that I must always remember is why I dance. I don't dance to impress anyone or cause a conflict; I dance for myself because I love to dance. Movement allows me to express what I am trying to say by using my body. When I dance on stage or in the classroom, I focus on the intention of my work and the message I am trying to portray to the audience. I believe that dance is one of the most beautiful things in the world. Although it is awfully challenging, it is an art form like no other that can take someone on a journey through time and space. I have learned so much about myself as a dancer and a human being over the last four years, but this is not the end. I know that I continue on my journey out into the world, I will experience places and things that I never knew existed. I am excited to see what opportunities the future holds for dancers and to continue to grow and learn about this amazing art form that has touched many people.